

of concern and management systems outlined in the report to Congress.

2. Section 118 of the MMPA requires NMFS to convene Take Reduction Teams (TRT) to develop plans for reducing the mortality and serious injury of marine mammals incidental to commercial fisheries. NMFS established the Atlantic Offshore Cetacean TRT in 1996, and the TRT developed a draft plan to reduce bycatch of the strategic marine mammal stocks taken in the U.S. Atlantic pelagic longline and driftnet fisheries. The TRT recommended that workshops be conducted to educate vessel owner/operators and crew members about strategies for reducing incidental harvest of marine mammals, guidelines for releasing entangled animals, and the MMPA and its implementing regulations. Another purpose of these workshops is to provide a forum for information exchange regarding successful strategies for reducing incidental takes of marine mammals. Although participation is not mandatory under the MMPA, it is likely that attendance at these workshops will be a requirement of NMFS' proposed Atlantic Offshore Cetacean Take Reduction Plan.

3. Section 7 of the ESA requires all Federal agencies to ensure that any action, funded, authorized, or carried out, is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any listed species. If such action adversely affects a listed marine species under NMFS jurisdiction, a consultation must be conducted, and NMFS must provide a written biological opinion on the effects. A consultation was conducted on the Atlantic Pelagic Fishery, and NMFS concluded in the biological opinion (May 29, 1997; amended July 10, 1998) that the longline component of the Atlantic Pelagic Fishery was likely to adversely affect, but not jeopardize, the continued existence of listed sea turtles. The opinion requires NMFS to develop a schedule of workshops throughout the geographical range of the fishery to educate vessel operators on appropriate sea turtle resuscitation, and handling and release techniques. All vessel operators must attend a workshop before commencing fishing operation in September 2000. Thus, for purposes of the ESA, participation in at least one workshop is mandatory.

Special Accommodations

These hearings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Rebecca Lent (see FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT).

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: October 15, 1998.

Gary C. Matlock,

*Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 971208298-8055-02; I.D.
101698A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pollock by Vessels Catching Pollock for Processing by the Offshore Component in the Bering Sea Subarea of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for pollock by vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the Bering Sea subarea of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the amount of the 1998 pollock total allowable catch (TAC) apportioned to vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the Bering Sea subarea of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), October 19, 1998, until 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mary Furuness, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

In accordance with § 679.20(c)(3)(iii), the Final 1998 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the BSAI (63 FR 12689, March 16, 1998) established the amount of the 1998 pollock TAC apportioned to

vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the Bering Sea subarea of the BSAI as 667,388 metric tons (mt).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the amount of the 1998 pollock TAC apportioned to vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the Bering Sea subarea of the BSAI will be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 662,388 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 5,000 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator finds that this directed fishing allowance will soon be reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for pollock by vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the Bering Sea subarea of the BSAI.

Maximum retainable bycatch amounts may be found in the regulations at § 679.20(e) and (f).

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. It must be implemented immediately in order to prevent overharvesting the amount of the 1998 pollock TAC apportioned to vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the Bering Sea subarea of the BSAI. A delay in the effective date is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. The fleet has already taken the amount of the 1998 pollock TAC apportioned to vessels catching pollock for processing by the offshore component in the Bering Sea subarea of the BSAI. Further delay would only result in overharvest. NMFS finds for good cause that the implementation of this action can not be delayed for 30 days. Accordingly, under 5 U.S.C. 553(d), a delay in the effective date is hereby waived.

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: October 16, 1998.

Richard W. Surdi,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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